

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT ISSUED

Continuation of sport hunting of ducks, geese, and other migratory game birds under the control of annual hunting regulations issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the subject of a final environmental statement filed by the Department of the Interior with the Council on Environmental Quality on June 6, 1975.

The Department intends to continue issuing annual migratory bird hunting regulations as has been done each year since 1918, when the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was signed into law, implementing an international treaty with Great Britain designed to provide a uniform system of protecting migratory birds on a continental basis.

A notice of the availability of the final EIS was published in the Federal Register on June 13, 1975.

In October 1974 a lawsuit was brought in Federal Court against the Department of the Interior by four groups in New Jersey to halt migratory bird hunting nationwide on the ground that an environmental impact statement was not prepared before the 1974-75 Federal hunting regulations were issued. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires that major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment must be preceded by the publication of a statement of the environmental impact of the proposed action. The court determined that the provisions of the Act applied to the migratory bird hunting program even though the issuance of hunting regulations is not a new Federal action.

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The lawsuit was settled out of court, and the Department of the Interior agreed to complete an environmental impact statement before the 1975-76 hunting regulations are issued.

The final statement describes the impacts of continued issuance of annual regulations which includes open seasons, season lengths, daily bag and possession limits, shooting hours, area closures, and other special management provisions. This is intended to ensure that the number of birds killed by sport hunting each year does not jeopardize any particular species from perpetuating its numbers in the wild. Annual regulations are necessary because the abundance of each species varies from year to year, depending on a wide variety of factors such as weather on the breeding grounds, incidence of natural diseases in the wild, and weather on the wintering grounds. Annual regulations generally become restrictive as populations decrease and more liberal as populations increase. This is particularly true of the more intensively hunted species such as waterfowl.

The Fish and Wildlife Service considered four alternatives to the proposal including allowing States to set migratory bird hunting regulations, establishing international regulations, issuing regulations for periods longer than one year, and taking no action. The impact of these alternatives is discussed in detail in the final statement.

A draft version of this final environmental statement was published in February 1975. Seven public hearings were held nationwide on the draft. A total of 483 persons attended, and 65 formal statements were presented. More than 48,000 letters and petitions representing the views of more than 78,000 citizens were received by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Many editorial changes, organizational editing, and supplemental additions of information were made as a result of public participation in development of the final statement; however, the basic proposal--to continue issuing annual regulations--was unchanged.

Copies of the final environmental statement are available in Washington for public inspection at the Department of the Interior, 18th and C Streets, N.W., Room 2352, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Copies are also available for public inspection at the following Regional and Area offices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service:

813 D Street, Anchorage, Alaska
1500 Plaza Building, 1500 Irving Street, Portland, Oregon
500 Gold Avenue, S.W., Albuquerque, New Mexico
Federal Building, Fort Snelling, Twin Cities, Minnesota
17 Executive Park Drive, N.E., Atlanta, Georgia
John M. McCormack Post Office, Boston, Massachusetts
10597 West Sixth Avenue, Denver, Colorado

Single copies may be obtained by writing to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Environmental Coordination, Washington, D.C. 20240.